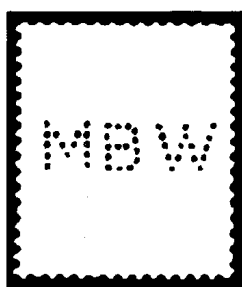
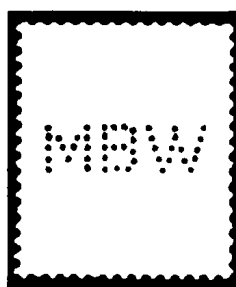


In Bulletin No.321 I presented my findings on the early Sloper "GR/W" dies, resulting in the re-construction of two of Joseph Sloper's dies used to initial stamps for the Great Western Railway. This time, while compiling information for the letter "M", two more studies using the Line Engraved issues of Queen Victoria have revealed hitherto well-kept secrets! All three analyses have been made possible by the survival in quantity of the necessary material.

The first to give up a secret is the relatively common die "MBW" (M0810.01M) used by the Metropolitan Board of Works in London, 1870-1885. It is known on the Queen Victoria 1d red from at least 94 different plate numbers, as well as other issues and values. A careful study of the material reveals the existence of a slightly narrower pattern, but is it a separate die or part of a multi-headed die? Note how close the "W" is to the "B" in the two illustrations below.



"Normal"

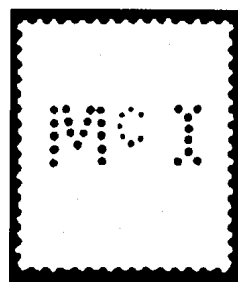


"Narrow"

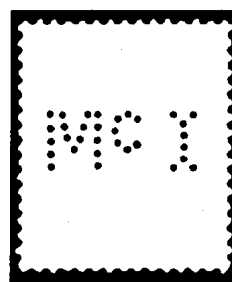
Fortunately there are over 70 examples of this particular die in the Skinner-Gault Permanent Collection, so the first task was to separate those with the narrower setting from the examples with 'normal' spacing. There were nine of the 'narrow' variety, but importantly, all were from the 'E' and 'K' columns of the original sheets of stamps. This can only mean one thing - the die must have been multi-headed 6x1, with the narrower setting in the 5<sup>th</sup> position.

Try as I might, I could not see any other characteristics in the 'normal' examples to enable pattern positioning 'by eye', but the right-hand, lower corner letters will naturally place them. The 1<sup>st</sup> pattern will be in column 'A', the 2<sup>nd</sup> in column 'B', etc.

The second 'subtle' secret to emerge from an analysis of an accumulation of Queen Victoria 1d Reds is the fact that the equally common die "McI" (M1280.01) appears to have been re-furbished (in part at least) at some time in its life. Again some 70 examples were inspected for differences, but this time it was noticed that the holes forming the "c" could be either very fine or of a clearly larger diameter. The differences in pin diameters used for the "c" can be clearly seen in the illustrations below.



“Fin Pins”



“Refurbished”

This time separating the 'fine' and 'larger' hole varieties into piles corresponding to their stamp sheet columns A, B, C, etc., revealed no particular pattern. However, what did emerge was an observation that the lower plate numbers had the fine holes and the higher plate numbers the larger holes. This is a clear pointer to the possibility that something specific happened at a particular point in time, in this case, the die was altered presumably to strengthen the "c".

The highest 1d Red plate number known so far with fine holes is *plate 171*, first put to press in *October 1873*. The fine holes are also known on a QV 3d *plate 14*, first put to press in *January 1874*, so a date sometime in 1874 would seem reasonable for when the pins forming the "c" were strengthened.

Can anyone add any further information (or logic) that can help place more accurately when the modification took place to the "McI" die?

I would also be interested to hear from anyone who has material supporting (or contradicting!) the suggestion that the "MBW" die was multi-headed 6x1 (i.e. in a horizontal line of six patterns).